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Governor Chafee Highlights Rhode Island's Ongoing Actions to Combat Drug Addiction, Reduce Stigmas & Promote Treatment and Recovery

CDC Provides Additional Support to State Efforts

Providence, R.I., -- Governor Lincoln D. Chafee today outlined Rhode Island's ongoing actions and strategies to address the marked increase in drug-related overdoses, addiction and crime. He also met with some of those affected by the emerging epidemic during a visit to Anchor Recovery Center in Pawtucket.

"Rhode Island is working creatively as a cohesive team to battle addiction," Governor Chafee said. "By involving state public health, recovery and safety officials, we are implementing solutions that benefit all Rhode Islanders."

Over the past several months, Governor Chafee has worked informally with state and municipal leaders. In addition, HEALTH requested the assistance of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and members of a team of CDC Epidemic Intelligence Service Officers were deployed to Providence in March for a weeklong review of all drug overdose deaths that occurred in Rhode Island between January 1, 2012, and March 31, 2014.

The Governor is calling on Rhode Island to come together to fight this battle by expanding prevention and treatment, as well as strengthening our efforts to combat prescription-drug abuse. Overdose deaths now total at least 85 since the start of 2014.

"This epidemic does not discriminate," Steven M. Costantino, Secretary of the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, said. "It tragically impacts all of our state's communities and touches all segments of Rhode Island society. A public health crisis of this magnitude demands, and is receiving, a collaborative and robust response."

Among some of the other steps taken are:

- With the assistance of CVS/Caremark, during the month of March, we secured three billboards with messaging about addiction, treatment and recovery.

- Walgreens has made available to the public naloxone kits. (Naloxone is also known by the trade name Narcan.) When administered in a timely manner, naloxone can reverse an overdose and save a life. It is a safe and effective opioid antagonist, and has been administered in Rhode Island 447 times from January 1 to April 16, 2014.
- The Director of HEALTH Michael Fine, MD, has signed two emergency regulations: One puts naloxone in use more easily and broadly; the other, developed with the CDC, requires that overdoses and suspected overdoses be reported to HEALTH within 48 hours.
- Both Dr. Fine and Craig Stenning, Director of the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), signed a letter to the president of the Association of Local Police Chiefs, encouraging them to train and equip officers in the use and administration of naloxone.
- Director Stenning announced a demonstration project based at one of BHDDH's licensed treatment service providers, which will offer interested physicians an immediate opiate-use assessment by a licensed Chemical Dependency Professional for any of their patients who have been identified as high risk for opiate abuse. Through this consult program, physicians will have immediate access to substance abuse screenings, assessments for their opiate-prescribed patients and recommended treatment responses.
- HEALTH has developed materials and an information campaign to reduce stigma and encourage treatment.
- Governor Chafee is working closely with the other New England governors and other concerned federal parties to create a regional plan to deal with this acute public health crisis.
- In response to a letter from the governors to the Ambassador of Canada, Gary Doer, Ambassador Doer said he will urge Canada's Minister of Health to work with them to curb the growing problem of prescription drug and opioid abuse on both sides of our border.

"Addiction is a disease and needs to be treated as a disease by physicians, patients, families, and the community as a whole," Dr. Fine said. "Our gratitude goes out to the members of the CDC Intelligence Service whose resources and expertise gathering information about this disease will be providing Rhode Island with the best scientific evidence of how to stop it."

"People suffering from the chronic, relapsing disease of addiction need support and encouragement from their families, friends and community to seek treatment and recovery,"

BHDDH's Director Stenning said. "People recover in different ways. It is important to know that a variety of treatment and support services are available."

"We now know that in addition to law enforcement, many other departments and agencies, specifically those related to treatment and health providers, need to be involved to stem the tide of this public health matter," Governor Chafee said. "Among those key to battling this epidemic are our private partners such as Walgreens and CVS/Caremark. I want to thank both companies for stepping up and ensuring the public is educated about addiction, which we all agree is a serious, life-threatening health issue."

In addition to Secretary Costantino, BHDDH's Director Stenning and HEALTH's Dr. Fine, other state leaders actively committed to addressing this issue and sharing their expertise to educate the public include:

- Attorney General Peter Kilmartin
- Department of Children, Youth and Families Director, Janice DeFrances
- Department of Corrections Director, A.T. Wall
- Claims Specialist and Supervisor of the Rhode Island Interlocal Risk Management Trust, Paul Dutra
- Rhode Island Police Chiefs Association, Chief Elwood Johnson
- Rhode Island State Police, Colonel Steven O'Donnell

"The Rhode Island State Police is fully committed to public safety. The staggering numbers of people dying or impacted by heroin overdoses needs our attention. By next week, troopers will be trained on the policy to carry and use naloxone. In taking this important step, we are helping to bring this issue to the forefront in an effort to make more people aware of the dangers of narcotics and help protect citizens from dying. I commend Dr. Fine and Craig Stenning on their unwavering leadership on this issue," Colonel O'Donnell said.

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